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## Reading the EU's Migration and Security 'Crises' through (South-)Eastern Europe

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*Published in:*  
Journal of European Studies

*DOI:*  
[10.1177/0047244119859176](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244119859176)

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*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Neuman-Stanivukovic, S., & Neuman, M. (2019). Reading the EU's Migration and Security 'Crises' through (South-)Eastern Europe. *Journal of European Studies*, 49(3-4), 374-393.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244119859176>

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# Reading the EU's migration and security 'crises' through (South-)Eastern Europe

Journal of European Studies  
2019, Vol. 49(3–4) 374–393  
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DOI: 10.1177/0047244119859176  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jes



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## Abstract

This article addresses contemporary thinking about EU crises from the locations of South-East and Eastern Europe. It asks how the European migration and security 'crises' have unfolded in institutional structures, political and public discourses, and people's everyday experiences in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. The analysis challenges the treatment of European crises as ontologically given, and calls for the adoption of critical conceptual and analytical approaches that study these crises outside European dis/order binarism. It exposes European crises as a privileged and conservative designation that normalizes European multiplicity within the teleology of a linear and spatially bound EU institutional order.

## Keywords

critical European Studies, Eastern Europe, EU crisis, EU neighbourhood, European dis/order, European migration crisis, European security crisis, South-East Europe

The aim of this article is to bring the conversation about European crises to the context of the European Union's (EU's) enlargement and neighbourhood governance. More specifically, it makes use of empirical insights into the EU's crisis governance in enlargement and neighbourhood countries to critically address conceptual discussions within European studies on the meaning of European crises and the construction of Europe

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through these crises. We start from the premise that the EU's immediate 'outside' complicates the binary distinction between 'crisis' and 'normality'. Thinking about European integration through the stories and practices of what is constructed as the EU's immediate outside makes visible the porousness of the EU's institutions and borders. The location of the EU's outside allows us to see and critique how the EU's crisis discourses prioritize and acknowledge events and vulnerabilities closer to the EU's institutional core, while side-lining others further afield.

In this article, we see events grouped together under the common denominator of 'European crisis' as multifaceted. This is why the teleological reading of the European project, which uses the EU's institutional order as a normative structure for codifying certain events as European crises while side-lining others, is not exhaustive. Because crises are evaluated against stability or disruptions in the EU's institutional order, some crises are seen as more European, or more of a crisis, than others; the mutual constitution of events classified as crises remains overlooked; and the articulation of some events and experiences as a particular form of European crisis normalizes and silences others.

The need to examine the European crisis beyond the conceptual confines of the European institutional order becomes particularly evident in the case of enlargement of the EU and its relations with neighbouring countries. The EU's enlargement and neighbourhood governance speak to the ambiguity of the institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries of the EU, which becomes even more evident in the context of the EU's crisis management. This relies substantially on the concurrent extension of EU rules and norms beyond EU borders on the one hand, and differentiation of the level and scope of the respective states' integration with the EU on the other hand (Lavanex, 2016). The observed shifts in governance practices correspond with the reconceptualization of the EU's constitutive outside – the countries subject to its enlargement and neighbourhood governance – as unstable liminal spaces where the European order is to be installed and defended (Johansson-Nogués, 2018).

The extension of the EU's institutional and policy architecture beyond the EU proper through the neighbourhood and enlargement governance obscures the understanding of the EU as institutionally consolidated and spatially bounded. The territories, governing apparatuses and populations of countries subject to enlargement and neighbourhood governance become articulated in the EU, thereby redefining the EU/non-EU dichotomy (Casas-Cortes et al., 2012). As post-socialist but not yet or not fully EU-ropean, South-East and Eastern Europe, in particular, take an institutionally, spatially and temporally provisional and therefore indeterminable position vis-à-vis the EU. This position complicates a distinction between what is orderly and what is disorderly and obscures the possibility of naming a crisis in opposition to normality and renewal. More explicitly, the indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe makes crisis judgement, and the question of *what went wrong*, illegible. This is why the perspectives of South-East and Eastern Europe bring questions of erasure, invisibility and idleness into the core of the discussion on the European crisis and as such offer a critical intervention into the conceptual discussions of the crisis as a rupture and a turning point in EU integration.

Accordingly, this article proposes a more nuanced reading of crises – one that accounts for the multiplicities and contradictions inherent in the European integration project. The argument is organized as follows. Conceptually, the article first maps the teleological

assumptions about the European project within European studies and, in particular, European crisis literature, examining the implications of these assumptions when classifying certain events as normal and others as a failure and a deviation from the normal. We explain how through the analytical prism of European integration as a linear progression towards the EU's institutional order, multiple contingencies are construed as either disruptions or renewals of that order. In response, this article reconceptualizes European integration as a continuous spatial and institutional re(b)ordering through multiple socio-technological assemblages (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Moisio, 2016; Richardson and Jensen, 2003). Applying this insight to the discussion of the European crisis allows for the analysis of events and experiences that occur outside politicized and mediatized EU crisis discourses.

Methodologically, with a particular focus on EU governance in South-East and Eastern Europe, we aim to deconstruct claims about the essence of the European project which render possible differentiations between order (normality) and disorder (crisis). The indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the EU helps us problematize how crisis is defined by the order/disorder binary. Rather than discussing the truthfulness of some crisis narratives over others, and evaluating the corresponding capacity of existing conceptual accounts of the European crisis to encompass the multiplicity of stories and experiences, we are interested in cases where these accounts collapse. By grounding the analysis in small-scale exploratory studies of, firstly, the so-called 'European migration crisis' in South-East Europe, and, second, the security crisis in the Eastern EU neighbourhood countries (particularly Ukraine), we question the analytical usefulness of asking what a European crisis means and shift the analysis to asking how the crisis operates. We show how the production of South-East Europe and the Eastern neighbourhood as resilient subjects by the EU's security and border assemblages intersects with the experience on the ground of incoherence and discontinuity. The European crisis is concurrently confirmed in the articulated necessity of protecting the European order in the resilient neighbourhood, and simultaneously made banal, illegible and idle in its instability.

## **European crises and the EU's institutional dis/order**

Challenges to the EU's institutional order by the manifold events codified as European crises have mobilized a discussion on the ability of existing theoretical lenses to make sense of the now visible complexities of the political, societal and cultural encounters linked to European integration. These events have exposed the pro-integration bias inherent to EU integration theorizing, with the available analytical tools proving ill-equipped to predict and respond to those events that vividly challenge the narrative of EU integration as a linear progression towards 'an ever closer union' (Börzel, 2018). In the context of the EU's crisis management, strengthening the institutions has, at times, resulted in more societal uncertainty and instability, whereas the institutions' flexibility and differentiation has become the new norm characterizing the EU's renewal process (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015). Scholarship responded by developing novel vocabulary such as 'failing forward', 'differentiated integration' and 'constraining politicization' to reorient analysis back to the EU's institutional order (Börzel and Risse, 2018; Holzinger

and Schimmelfennig, 2012; Jones et al., 2016). These analytical tools are valuable for a more nuanced insight of the crises, but they are not exhaustive.

Crises are overwhelmingly conceptualized as the euro or the Schengen crises and analysed as, first, a systemic rupture due to the failure of institutions to respond to external shocks and, second, institutional stagnation or renewal through political and policy processes including supra-nationalization, intergovernmental conflict and/or politicization (Börzel and Risse, 2018; Falkner, 2018). As such, the literature is teleological because it concentrates multiple processes and events around the EU's institutional order. The teleological conflation of the European political project with the EU's institutional order and the consequent insistence on measuring and evaluating manifold crises in regard to this order makes it difficult for the literature to pose questions about the connections between the many crises and their multiple geographical and temporal manifestations (Kjaer and Olsen, 2016). Critical interventions in the discussion show a need to complement the nominal arguments (i.e. the European crisis is this/that; it has functioned/functions as this/that) with inquiries into the practices and performances of making and governing Europe in crisis (Cordero et al., 2017). These inquiries include closer scrutiny of what kind of conceptual work a crisis does in relation to the temporal and spatial structures that define European political order. Of particular relevance becomes the question of how the crisis/normality binarism reproduces and contests the temporalities and spatialities of the EU, consequently making certain events visible and subjects vulnerable and repairable, and others not.

We enter the discussion through the alleged absence of South-East and Eastern Europe in the European crises. Rendering crises legible as crises of the European institutional order construes the political processes, practices and everyday experiences in the European neighbourhood and enlargement countries as ordinary and/or as an external threat to the EU. European crises are normalized in the EU's neighbouring countries in the way that events that are signified as meaningful and disruptive for the EU proper are deemed normal, regular, ordinary and therefore unintelligible in the non-EU proper. To illustrate, economic stagnation, social unrest, contested territorialities, illiberalism or failing (trust in) institutions are signified as crises for the European Union and endemic for the non-EU (Jones and Clark, 2008). It is not that the neighbourhood is seen as stable, but rather that the order/disorder and normality/crisis distinction is suspended because uncertainty and instability are seen as chronic and therefore a rule.

At the same time, various escalations of violence or wholesale destabilization in the non-EU proper are only signified as European crises when visualized and intensified as a threat to the EU proper. EU/non-EU and order/disorder binaries are transgressed in the construction of the EU/enlargement policy nexus and the EU/European neighbourhood policy nexus, as resilient enlargement and neighbourhood countries become integral to EU crisis management and to restoring European certainty and secure sense of self. The immediate neighbourhood thus becomes the EU's showcase arena to prove its ability to inject order into the unstable other, not solely and primarily for the sake of the neighbourhood, but also for the sake of a more secure EU in the eyes of EU citizens (Johansson-Nogués, 2018).

As a result, the discourse and practice of European crises construct the enlargement and neighbourhood countries concurrently as silent – chronically disorderly and lethargic – and explosive – rampant, chaotic and threatening. The crisis is both

normalized as chronic, endemic and interior to the enlargement/neighbourhood other, and spectacularized through representations of the potential crisis and conflict spill-over to the EU.

As such, the nature of the enlargement/neighbourhood as always ‘becoming Europe’ locates the crisis somewhere in the drift between the insignificant and the spectacularized that we can never fully know. This crisis that is always in the potential unsettles the common-sense distinction between crisis and normality, and order and disorder. Reading the European crisis through the enlargement and neighbourhood implodes the boundaries between an orderly Europe and the disorderly other, showing limitations in the understanding of a crisis as a value judgement about the displaced order. The crisis is defined by a degree of indeterminacy that escapes our conceptual grasp and evaluative tools located in the binarisms of crisis/normality, order/disorder and self/other.

### **Unsettling European crises from the East – methodological considerations**

Within this article, we take, as our point of departure, this indeterminacy of the European crises in South-East and Eastern Europe to explain the alleged absence of these regions from the European crises and to think outside the established institutional readings of the European crises. We argue from the geographic and temporal location of South-East and Eastern Europe as a *becoming*-Europe that cannot be settled within the EU/non-EU binary or along the linear post-socialist/European continuum. South-East and Eastern Europe unsettle the existing readings of the European crisis not because of their position in between the post-socialist and European, but due to the indeterminacy of their respective futures, which are illegible by the post-socialist/European continuum. This refers in particular to the condition of the post-socialist transition, where transition is never fully completed, while being European is desired but not fully achievable. In South-East and Eastern Europe, the European institutional order is detached from its original meaning and purpose to become a synonym for becoming European, and the enlargement and neighbourhood governance are also defined and legitimized through this never completely fulfillable desire for Europe.

While cautiously drawing from a difficult conversation between postcolonial, post-socialist and decolonial scholarship, authors such as Baker (2018), Bjelić (2018), and Chari and Verdery (2009) have been calling for a better understanding of how the European political project is negotiated in and through Europe’s multiple peripheries. This scholarship has argued that the post-Cold War disappearance of East/West binarism has displaced and disoriented the South-East and Eastern European subject through the loss of the East, which was never fully substituted by the West in the context of European integration (Iveković, 2004). Kovačević (2008a; 2008b) suggests that the legacy of post-colonial work is key in examining the EU’s proto-colonial relationship with its Eastern periphery. This includes the exploitation of labour and extraction of resources and the colonial-type mechanisms of controlled transformation, as well as Eastern Europe’s own self-orientalization, which is engraved in the EU accession/neighbourhood framework. Tlostanova (2012) sees the post-socialist subject as defined by a futureless ontology that

emerges from the realization that the desired transition from the East and the socialist to 'Europe', cultivated by the 'catch-up' and 'return-to-Europe' Europeanization projects, is unattainable. The double fallout of modernity in its socialist and Western European vernaculars dispossesses the post-socialist subject of any teleology. Tlostanova's position can be associated with the established critique of transitology, and Europeanization as its spin-off, for reducing the post-socialist subject to the embodiment of nothingness that is then reproduced and reformed in accordance with the West. Gržinić and Tatlić (2014) suggest that the aftermath of the Cold War has enabled an erasure of the (former) Eastern Europe through its exclusion from history, knowledge and memory and its reproduction as a copy and a frontier of (as/in/at) the new Europe. (Former) Eastern Europe is thus excluded from the possible and becomes a plastic and fluid terrain in which the (former) West reproduces and establishes itself as Europe. Buden (2010) examines how the transition has normalized the contradictions of domination and resistance inherent in the eruption of freedom in a society. The (former) East was reduced to the landscape of nothingness and infantilized, to be trained, developed and adjusted to (now externally provided) democracy.

The indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe that exists outside the teleologies of socialism, on the one hand, and European integration, on the other, helps us locate crises beyond the binarism of the European institutional order and disorder. Consequently, we think about crisis through the indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe, as these regions become unbound from the teleologies of the socialist past and European future. Rather than adopting a teleological judgement of a European crisis as an order that was disrupted and/or renewed, the adopted perspective helps us define Europe through multiplicity, relationality, fluidity and therefore also indeterminacy, which are rendered abnormal and disorderly through the notion of a crisis.

Hence, we analyse discourses and practices that define the eventfulness and apprehensibility of European crises to see what cannot be determined by these crisis designations. Reading European crises through the indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe exposes the crisis as a privileged designation that seeks to stabilize contradictions and contingencies that are inherent to social and political spheres (Masco, 2017; Roitman, 2013). Roitman (2013) writes about crisis as a conservative value judgement about what went wrong that conditions political potentiality between collapse, on the one hand, and continuous improvement, on the other, and which legitimizes political action through a sense of urgency to restore order. With this in mind, the invisibility and uneventfulness of processes in South-East and Eastern Europe in the European crisis opens up the question of whether it is possible to judge something as a crisis outside the dis/order binary. As judgements about the presence or absence of a European crisis are tainted by the teleology of the European institutional order, our analysis takes recourse to the indeterminate crises which are hard to represent, notice and apprehend – hence, to crisis potentiality.

We ask how illegible events become legible as European crises and, subsequently, how they become governed, contested and sustained in view of the fluid and contradictory dynamics of European governance. Additionally, we analyse how the temporal and spatial structures established by the European crisis/renewal narratives are constituted, moulded and unsettled in South-East and Eastern Europe when combined with other

practices and knowledge. To this end, the analysis is situated in two small-scale exploratory studies: first, the so-called European migration crisis from the perspective of South-East Europe; and, second, the security crisis in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, particularly Ukraine. These two small-scale exploratory studies are not comparative in nature, but are meant to shed light on what perspectives from the EU's immediate outside might tell us about European crises.

In the first case, we analyse how the crisis became legible as a European migration crisis but was also unsettled in the location of South-East Europe. We read the EU's crisis-governance discourses and practices, particularly around the formalization and de-formalization of the so-called Western Balkan Route, against the experiences on the ground, the mobility practices and strategies of migrants, and the emergent migrant apparatuses. To untangle the EU's migration/enlargement governance assemblage in the region, the analysis draws on multilateral agreements, European Council and European Commission communications, and Frontex analysis reports related to the EU's migration governance along the Western Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean migration routes. Furthermore, it relies on European Commission and national documentation and communication concerning enlargement progress, and documents related to the migration and asylum policies of South-East European countries. This is then juxtaposed with reports, mapping archives and migrant testimonies published by non-governmental organizations and grassroots activist networks, supported by the authors' close ties to grassroots communities in the region. In the second case, we analyse the emergence of – and the EU's responses to – the security crisis in the Eastern neighbourhood post-Euromaidan. We discuss new governance approaches, mostly grounded in the logic of strengthening resilience, that the EU developed in order to normalize the crisis potentiality of the region. To this end, we draw on primary documents issued by the European Commission, the European Council and the European External Action Service, bearing witness to the EU's gradual bringing of the East into the EU proper and subsequent policy adaptations.

Each case is organized in two steps. In the first step, we analyse how the optic of the European crisis makes indeterminacy legible, manageable and quantifiable through the technologies of European governance, including mechanisms, procedures, instruments, vocabularies and micro-practices, such as timetables and statistical databases of crisis management and resilience-building. We take note of the emergence of novel assemblages that reassemble the existing boundaries of the European order in the context of European crisis management. We argue that these assemblages incorporate the crisis potentiality into the fabric of the European political project through the construction of a subject that is inherently precarious or vulnerable but also resilient. In the second step, we explore crisis potentiality further by asking if and how one can concurrently be in and overcome the crisis. We are interested in the creative practices and strategies through which subjects that are 'caught in crisis' use time and space to make sense of the European crisis and to make it comprehensible on their own terms. This two-step analytical design methodologically connects the identified exploratory studies. These studies, however, differ in the level of analysis in that the first deconstructs the European crisis from the grounded position of migratory assemblages, whereas the second adopts a more institutional reading of how the European crisis was articulated and governed.



## **‘European crisis’ and the European border regime in South-East Europe**

The following section outlines how the European institutional order was unsettled by the 2015–18 migratory movement into Western Europe through landlines from Turkey to Greece and Bulgaria; through North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia; through Hungary and Croatia; and through Austria, Slovenia and Italy. This movement was termed the ‘European migration crisis’ and consequently governed through the formalization and de-formalization of the so-called ‘Western Balkan Route’. This case is significant to our discussion of the indeterminacy of South-East Europe in relation to the EU as follows: it speaks to South-East Europe’s concurrent absence from the European crisis in terms of recognition, on the one hand, and its visibilization in the mediatized border/rescue spectacle<sup>1</sup> in the context of the migration crisis, on the other hand. We point out that the fluid nature of the EU’s border regime in South-East Europe, which is always reacting to migratory movements, produces multiple ‘timespace’ structures<sup>2</sup> that stand outside the European institutional order. The crisis then operates as a conservative judgement that seeks to restore and stabilize the appearance of the European institutional order while restricting other narratives and courses of actions through the construction of an unstable, vulnerable, yet resilient South-East Europe. South-East European institutions and societies are sustained as precarious through the lens of a continuous post-socialist transition and are therefore particularly vulnerable to pressures of human mobility, while at the same time they are expected to adapt to these pressures and bear an active role in the protection of the EU’s external border. The position of the EU as an active force in the transformation of the region is substituted for a more restrained one, where the EU valorizes South-East Europe’s capacity to endure and adapt through building resilience.

The analysis focuses on how the Western Balkan Route was constructed and governed through an interplay between established migration control apparatuses, on the one hand, and grounded practices and experiences of migrants and migrant solidarity networks, on the other. This approach, following the established critique of the ‘Fortress Europe’ metaphor within critical migration and border scholarship, helps us reimagine how migrants become political and social subjects not only within the state, as risky or humanitarian subjects, or against the state as resisting subjects, but also outside the existing structures of statehood and citizenship (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012). This perspective has two particular implications for our efforts to critique and deconstruct an understanding of the European migration crisis as a rupture in the EU’s institutional order. First, rather than essentializing migrants as passive objects of a given order that establish their subjectivity solely through practices of resistance, it studies how migration assemblages actively participate in the continuous remodelling of the EU by re-appropriating mechanisms of control, and by producing uncontrollable structures that then need to be tamed through the reordering of the border regime. Second, rather than treating border management at the external frontier of Schengen as static and consolidated, the European border regime is understood as a fragmented apparatus of capture that recuperates (manages) the knowledge and creativity of migrants’ practices of appropriation (Shell, 2018: 275). Variegated EU borders, including the Schengen area, the temporal within-Schengen border-checks, and forms of externalized border-zones/

border-management or the so-called ‘hot-spots’ are de/re-territorialized through overlapping exercises of sovereignty by multiple and heterogeneous actors including member states’ customs and border police, Frontex, Eurojust, Europol etc. (Council of the European Union, 2018; Johnson, 2017).

Migratory movements were rendered legible as the European migration crisis and, *inter alia*, the crisis of the European institutional order upon the collapse of the political, legal and administrative structures and materialities of the European border regime in the face of ‘Europe’s long summer of migration’ in 2015 and the ‘March for Hope’ of 4–6 September, in particular (Kasperek and Speer, 2015). The March for Hope, in which over 4000 migrants and local groups that were mobilized to act in solidarity with migrants collectively enacted *the right to move* and *the right to stay* by means of a 170-kilometre march from Budapest to the Austrian border, came in response to the decision of the Hungarian government to close the border and stop all trains to Austria. This was followed by a wholesale suspension of the Dublin regulation by Germany and Austria, and the consequent temporary formalization of the Western Balkan Route through disruptive patterns of ‘opening’ the passage to migrants until November, when the passage was officially closed.

The formalization and de-formalization of the route can be seen as a continuation of the incorporation of the non-EU members of South-East Europe into the EU’s migration and border management regime initiated by accession-driven Europeanization. The participation of Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia in the formalization of the route was triggered by the ad hoc border openings by Western European countries as well as migrant protests and migrant solidarity actions by grassroots structures, activists, the media and political opposition. Importantly, the management of migratory movements through partial formalizations of transit had already been practised by countries such as Serbia and North Macedonia throughout 2015. These passages were informal but acknowledged; the economy around the (in)visibility and informality of migrant transit was mixed, with criminalization and migrant detention but also the issuing of temporary documents (72-hour transit papers), the establishment of stop-centres and transit zones, and offers of humanitarian assistance to migrants.

In late October 2015, under Austrian leadership, three non-EU countries (Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia) and eight EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia) developed a coordinated approach to border and migration control along the West Balkan Route, which culminated in March 2016 with North Macedonia closing its border with Greece by building a fence, deploying police controls and increasing pushbacks with full political and operational support from the Visegrad block, Austria, Croatia and Brussels. When the route was formally closed, informal journeys and networks reopened with people crossing North Macedonia on foot, making the journey more dangerous and costly, and then waiting in Belgrade and Subotica to attempt to cross the border to Hungary either at legalized transit zones or at spots with less police control. The strengthening of border controls and increased pushbacks by Hungarian authorities throughout 2016 further strained the already limited humanitarian and asylum infrastructures in Serbia. What is more, the increased coordination of Serbian and North Macedonian migration policies with the EU, in conjunction with Serbia’s opening of *acquis* Chapter 24 on Freedom and Security,

resulted in a tightening of migration laws and policies, the taking down of informal camps and their grassroots support structures and the potential militarization of border controls. While many remained 'stuck' in Serbia, the migratory movement was also rerouted to Albania, Montenegro and then via Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and Austria. In view of the complex governance structures that mark Bosnian statehood and the more opaque EU accession prospects for Bosnia, migrants became mostly concentrated in informal camps in Bihać and Velika Kladuša, where they faced border closures and violent pushbacks by Croatian police. With the EU reorienting security and migration to the centre of its Western Balkans agenda through an increased structural and infrastructural connectivity of South-East Europe with the EU, the political leadership in Albania, Bosnia and Montenegro became unwilling to host the so-called disembarkation platforms (camps) on their territories, and migration is now openly used as a bargaining chip in the enlargement negotiations (Erebara, 2018). Simultaneously, the EU's presence in the region is furthered through administrative and security apparatuses and the material infrastructures of border control, which include police training, technical equipment for border and migrant monitoring, and the possible deployment of Frontex at borders with the EU under the status agreements (Frontex, 2016).

The porousness of South-Eastern European borders and the region's history are intertwined with the emergence of the route. The historical position of South-East Europe as a liminal space between West and East and the corresponding presence of, and resistance to, multiple political trajectories, as well as the mountainous terrain, has blurred the boundaries between legality and illegality. The objectives of achieving and consolidating statehood have produced informal, extra-legal governance structures, economies and spaces that have simultaneously maintained and undermined the order in which they were embedded. Throughout the 1990s, criminal networks operating in the region ballooned, and what was originally a heroin smuggling route opened up for all sorts of illicit activities, including the smuggling of weapons, cigarettes, oil, food and people. More significant migratory transit through the route was marked in 2014 when 150,000 Kosovans fled to Hungary, Austria and Switzerland because of chronic precariousness and uncertainty. This consolidated infrastructures and established logistics for the transit of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi migrants in 2015–16. Memories of refugee and diasporic experiences, in addition to the emergence of new, and the mobilization of old, trans-local activist networks, gave rise to heterogeneous solidarity structures. At the same time, the chronic crisis of statehood and transition has also conditioned the formation of material borders, immaterial borderscapes and affective economies of fear and denigration encountered by the migrants along the route. These are a result of violent territorial reshuffling and most recently the extreme violence that underpinned state-building in the 1990s in conjunction with the EU-accession-driven Europeanization of migration policies.

The European migration crisis spectacle visualized and designated complex and ephemeral trajectories of lived mobility and presence into a linear, unidirectional and manageable movement along the Western Balkan Route to Western Europe. It made illegible how migrants enact and negotiate their own subjectivity every day in the local contexts in which they are embedded and against a complex web of control that confines them and which they concurrently appropriate and overcome. This refers in particular to

the emergence of migrant assemblages – solidarity structures, smuggling networks, diasporic communities, transportation infrastructures, digital platforms, apps, and financial service infrastructures – that define processes and practices of migration and presence (Rubinov, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Through these assemblages, migrants develop strategies to negotiate, appropriate and transcend spaces of control to spaces of mobility, waiting and action. The affective economies of hope and desire are central in negotiating and re-appropriating the entrapment conditioned (also) by the location of South-East Europe. This hope for the (unattainable) European future, shared by migrants, citizens and states of South-East Europe, is empowering in transforming the precariousness and uncertainty of everyday experience into a potential otherwise/otherwhere, acting as a constitutive force in autonomous self-organization, while also conditioning endurance in the face of dangerous exposure and further precariousness and denigration (Berlant, 2011). Accordingly, these migrant assemblages need to be viewed outside the established dis/order binarisms. They are produced by strategies that operate within and outside structures of subjectivity, including citizenship/non-citizenship, im/mobility, subjectification/resistance, and in/visibility, and as such they constitute spaces of potentiality that are enduring as well as transcendental.

We see that the EU's institutional order in general, and the EU/non-EU binary in particular, was re-appropriated, transgressed and renegotiated concurrently by migrant mobilities within localized contexts along the Western Balkan Route and by the European border control and migration management regimes' (pre-emptive) attempts to capture these mobilities. If we analyse the migration crisis through the perspective of migratory assemblages and from the location of South-East Europe, the region becomes a central location where the migration crisis, as well as the EU's crisis management, has unfolded. Accordingly, South-East Europe's position vis-à-vis the EU was renegotiated in multiple disrupted temporal structures and in the uneven geographies of migrants' mobility and presence in and through the region. Time and space are now constructed as going beyond the linear narrative of the migrant moving from her home country to a desired country of destination, as the fragmented nature of migratory journeys consists of periods of waiting, transit and action. Similarly, the idea of the region's linear Europeanization process is challenged by the reactivation of former socialist and post-socialist activist networks and the memory of past horizontal solidarity practices (Tazzioli and Walters, 2019). Migratory movements and presence in the region have in turn opened up the possibility of the production of new fragmented structures of migration capture and control, thereby leading to a re-bordering of Europe in the region. More specifically, the frontiers of the EU's institutional order vis-à-vis the region were also renegotiated, partly, though not only, because of the externalization of the EU's border and migration management through the structures and infrastructures of enlargement policy.

In response, the protracted narratives and practices of the European migration crisis have served to stabilize these emergent indeterminate structures as the 'new normal', by articulating the always potentially threatening and vulnerable migrant in conjunction with resilient and always potentially unstable and vulnerable South-East Europe. First, the European migration crisis narrative has essentialized South-East Europe as a resilient and adaptable non-place of transition to and frontier in and of Europe (Augé, 1995). The

research presented in this article contests such a normalization of the crisis, for it fails to recognize the region as a location of migration and its societies as migration subjects.

Migratory movements have encountered and negotiated the chronic indeterminacy of South-East Europe as defined by the continuities and discontinuities of European integration, post-socialism, ethno-nationalism and radical translocalism (El-Shaarawi and Razsa, 2018). Socio-political assemblages arising from this indeterminacy have – in an encounter with migrants – produced zones of control, zones of transit and zones of action. It is therefore impossible to reduce the societies and political institutions of South-East Europe to the sole position of either a vulnerable or a resilient subject.

## **Deconstructing the security ‘crisis’ in the Eastern neighbourhood**

Similar to the case of South-East Europe discussed above, the following study brings the concurrent absence and visibility of the EU’s immediate Eastern neighbourhood in European crises to the fore. More specifically, it problematizes how what has previously been characterized as a chronically unstable non-EU has been reframed as a security challenge to the EU proper in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea by Russia in early 2014, the outbreak of civil war in Eastern Ukraine, and the fatal shooting down of the commercial airliner MH17. The EU’s newly developed approach to the region, firmly grounded in a logic of strengthening resilience through cross-border assemblages, shows the inadequacy of the EU/non-EU binary in understanding such crises.

While the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were preparing for their accession to the EU, the process being eventually completed in 2004 and 2007, the Union began to contemplate how to structure its future relationship with the countries that would soon constitute its new neighbours in the East. Against the Europeanizing soon-to-be-member states, who were working towards meeting the Copenhagen enlargement criteria, a space constructed as unstable, insecure and in a permanent state of chaos was slowly emerging east of the new border-to-be. Such framing was actively pursued by the soon-to-be Central and Eastern European member states, who rhetorically distanced themselves from their respective Eastern neighbours to prove their Europeaness, thereby legitimizing their own accession to the EU (Kuus, 2004; Schimmelfennig, 2001). That such rhetorical framing of the new Eastern neighbourhood fell on fertile ground is witnessed by the proposed European Neighbourhood Policy, which is meant to ‘share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries in strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2004: 3).<sup>4</sup> Throughout the strategy paper, the Commission (2004) discusses the neighbouring countries as insecure, unstable, lacking good governance, non-transparent, corrupt, economically weak, and riddled with regional conflicts. Yet, while the region is depicted as a chronically unstable one, it is not a region in crisis, as witnessed by the lack of any such designation. Rather, these attributes constitute the mundane conditions of the partner countries in question, who thereby become the target of the EU’s foreign policy instruments, particularly conditionality coupled with – at times – significant financial incentives. It is the attempts of these Eastern European countries to navigate the European

Union's conditionality that essentializes them to being permanently in a state of becoming European, a concept discussed earlier in this article.

The European Union's emphasis on conditionality, which stands at the core of both the broader European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) and the somewhat more focused Eastern Partnership (2009), which targets six specific Eastern European countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – reinforced the binary between a 'European' EU proper and a 'not-yet-European' non-EU proper. The EU, then, finds itself in the midst of a 'civilizing mission' (Witney and Dennison, 2015: 2) in an area which, due to its inherent characteristics, is understood as a region with significant crisis potential. For their part, the six European partner countries were faced with an impossible task: on the one hand, positioning themselves within such a permanently chaotic state of being vis-à-vis the EU and, on the other hand, trying to overcome the permanent state of becoming European to further their prospects for closer association with the Union. At the same time, these countries were a target for Russia's foreign policy instruments, which were attempting to firmly maintain the countries' place in Moscow's orbit (Averre, 2009). As a result, the Eastern European countries were forced to walk a tightrope between demonstrating enough reformist will towards the EU to continue drawing on its substantial financial aid and loans and reassuring Russia that their foreign policy orientation was not detrimental to its own foreign policy ambitions in the region (Pastore, 2014).

The EU addressed the region's constructed geographic and governmental in-betweenness and potential for crisis through what it knows best, namely institutional cooperation. Both the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership were meant to entangle the six Eastern European countries within a dense web of international agreements, increasing their mutual interdependence, thereby embedding the six in European political and economic order. Yet, despite – or maybe because of – the increasingly close association of (at least some of) these Eastern European countries with the EU, the crisis potential soon escalated into what was designated a crisis proper in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

When, under significant pressure from Russia, the then Ukrainian President Yanukovych announced on 21 November 2013 that Ukraine would not sign the long-negotiated Association Agreement with the EU at the upcoming Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius a week later, few could anticipate that this would launch one of the most severe crises in Europe since the end of the Cold War. The very day of the announcement, thousands of Ukrainian citizens took to the streets of Kyiv, Lviv and many other cities across the country, demanding the Ukrainian government to change course (yet again) and steer the country closer to Europe, as opposed to Russia. What lasted several months soon became known as 'Euromaidan', and can be read as a radical reclamation of Europe by the population of the non-EU proper. This is not to say that the protesters in the streets of Ukrainian cities appropriated European institutions, but rather the *idea* of Europe itself, as witnessed by the many banners and slogans bearing messages such as 'You cannot give us Europe, we are Europe'; 'Ukraine is part of Europe'; and 'Freedom is more than fear'. Representing the European order, it was not long before the EU as a whole and several of its member states individually became involved, attempting to negotiate between the protesters on the one hand and the Ukrainian government and the president on the other, calling for restraint on both sides, condemning the use of violence,

and setting the stage for peaceful and democratic parliamentary elections to be held within a short period of time (Pridham, 2014). Thus, the EU treated the events in Ukraine as a domestic political crisis that would require a domestic political solution, or, as Paet put it, as ‘merely another example of [S]lavic bickering that had little or nothing to do with [W]estern Europe’ (2015: 2). Nevertheless, while the EU at first perceived the Ukrainian events to be an ‘incident’ and carried on with ‘business as usual’ (Ikani, 2018: 17), this particular crisis in Europe did become a ‘European crisis’ after all. How can we make sense of this? When and why did this occur? And, most importantly, what kind of crisis was it labelled?

Three particular events in the aftermath of the initial Euromaidan protests contributed to the Ukrainian ‘bickering’ turning into a fully fledged European crisis: the annexation of Crimea by Russia; the outbreak of civil war in the Donbass and Luhansk regions; and the shooting-down of commercial airliner MH17 over Ukraine. All occurring in 2014 and all having as a common denominator some involvement of the Russian Federation, these events vividly brought the crisis in Ukraine to the EU proper. The annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of civil war not only called into question the territorial integrity of the EU’s neighbourhood, but also stood as testimony to the revisionist tendencies of Russia in (at the very least) its own backyard, sending shockwaves through many of the new(er) EU member states. The destruction of MH17 painfully brought to the fore the consequences of a regional conflict for the Union itself. The EU could no longer treat these events in isolation and as inherent to the instability of the Eastern neighbourhood: they now threatened both the security considerations of both the EU and its individual member states, with the EU public demanding decisive action (Johansson-Nogués, 2018). As German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, stated bluntly after MH17 was brought down on 17 July 2014, carrying mostly EU citizens, ‘the Ukraine crisis is by no means solely a regional issue. No, this example shows us: it affects all of us’ (cited in Ikani, 2018: 20). The fact that as a result of the Ukrainian crisis the already frail relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation deteriorated to previously unimaginable lows only aggravated the EU’s (and its citizens’) sense of a severe European security crisis threatening the stability of the European order (Haukkala, 2015).

With the crisis potential of the Eastern neighbourhood and its vulnerability now established, what mechanisms did the EU devise to govern, stabilize and normalize the permanently unstable neighbourhood? It launched a public consultation to rethink its foreign policy approach, which was to be embedded in a more substantial renegotiation of its foreign policy identity as manifested in the new EU Global Strategy. This Strategy recognizes the ever-present potential for crises in the Eastern neighbourhood. As High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, in her foreword to the document, expressed it: ‘Our wider region has become more unstable and more insecure’, with the Union itself ‘under threat’ and the ‘European security order . . . violated’ (European External Action Service, 2016: 3, 7).

For the EU, acknowledging that conflict and crisis is the ‘new normal’ in the Eastern neighbourhood (Witney and Dennison, 2015: 5) necessitated a rethinking of its foreign policy. Not giving up on the normative elements guiding its external action under the previous foreign policy conception – the 2003 European Security Strategy – entirely, the European Union’s engagement with the outside world was now to be guided

by ‘principled pragmatism’ (European External Action Service, 2016: 16). In terms of foreign policy objectives in the Eastern neighbourhood, the EU was to shift its focus from transformation to resilience (Bendiek, 2017; Korosteleva, 2018). This paradigm shift also made inroads into the EU’s emerging review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was the result of a public consultation process launched by the European Commission, which saw more than 250 responses from member states, partner governments, EU institutions, international organizations, civil society, businesses, think tanks, academia and other members of the public (European Commission, 2015). Can resilience, then, be seen as the new rationale for governing the increasingly complex Eastern neighbourhood (Chandler, 2014)? Does a focus on resilience allow the European Union to stabilize ‘crisis as the new normal’?

The EU defines resilience as ‘the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises’ (European External Action Service, 2016: 23). In principle, then, the EU would strengthen state capacity (where appropriate) and/or the respective civil societies east of its border. With a focus on resilience, the EU *de facto* accepts the impossibility of predicting the next illegible crisis to emerge in Eastern Europe and rather focuses on preparing the state and/or society for the unknown by enhancing their adaptability (Juncos, 2017). Coupled with its newly adopted principled pragmatist approach to foreign policy, the overhauled European Neighbourhood Policy introduces several innovations: the new policy first takes into account the diverging aspirations of the individual partner countries vis-à-vis the EU; second, it is more interest-oriented within a reduced number of priority areas; and third, it enhances local ownership by closely engaging actors in civil society (European Commission, 2015).

It is thus the framing of the permanently volatile Eastern European neighbourhood as a security crisis in the aftermath of the events surrounding the Euromaidan protests in late 2013 and early 2014 that brought the neighbourhood firmly *into* the Union proper, thereby further blurring the EU/non-EU binary. Two newly conceived mechanisms contribute to this blurring: the reformed Association Agreements and the creation of ad hoc Thematic Frameworks, both forming the cornerstone of the redesigned neighbourhood policy. The new generation of Association Agreements now signed between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine respectively, are exceptional in so far as they contain principles, concepts and provisions of EU law ‘which are to be interpreted and applied as if the third [S]tate is part of the EU’, ultimately resulting in ‘integration without membership’ (Van der Loo et al., 2014: 2). Thematic Frameworks, then, are the direct result of flexibly dealing with potential challenges as part of the EU’s focus on resilience. Identifying specific crisis potentialities, these frameworks are meant to go beyond the regularly consulted actors and are established for a limited period of time, thereby creating fluid, novel crisis management assemblages. These may bring together stakeholders from the EU, the partner country or countries in question, other neighbours (such as Turkey or Russia), other international organizations, international financial institutions, civil society organizations, private businesses and other social partners and serve as a forum for debate and for sharing and developing best practice. At the same time, these frameworks may even gain (temporary) access to EU institutions, technologies, and data, be it in the security, border management, migration, or economy domain, to name but a few (European Commission, 2015).



## Conclusion

This article provides a critical intervention into the ongoing discussions about the character of European crises. It problematizes these crises from the locations of South-East and Eastern Europe to question teleological accounts of the EU that characterize crises as externally produced ruptures in the EU's institutional order. It argues that the indeterminacy of South-East and Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the EU illuminates and unsettles discourses and practices that render fissures and contingencies in the EU's institutional order eventful and apprehensible as European crises, while also normalizing these crises in the disorderly non-EU. The European migration crisis and the European security crisis are addressed from the locations of South-East (migration) and Eastern (security) Europe to understand European crises outside of the dis/order and crisis/normality binarisms.

The article makes three propositions about how crisis management discourses and practices make legible and negotiate a Europe of complexity. First, the locations of South-East and Eastern Europe expose European crises as a privileged and conservative designation that normalizes multiple and split timespace structures inherent to the European project within the teleology of a linear and spatially bound EU institutional order. Illustrating this, migratory movements and the emergent grassroots solidarity structures in South-East Europe have transgressed the institutional, territorial and temporal boundaries between the European Union and the non-EU. We have seen Europe reassembled through multiple ephemeral and non-apprehensible migratory assemblages. The discourses and practices of the migration crisis then stabilized these new spatial and temporal connectivities back to the European institutional order through formalizing, and then suspending, the Western Balkan Route. In the case of Eastern Europe, we observed how the potential for instability and insecurity to spill over into the EU proper has blurred the EU/non-EU binary. The linear narrative of an escalating security crisis in the European neighbourhood in conjunction with the logic of a resilient neighbourhood proved central to the EU restoring its political, economic, and security governance and past practices in Eastern Europe, thereby reinstalling the very same EU/non-EU binary.

Second, the article establishes that the EU's exteriority is essentialized, captured and governed by EU crisis management assemblages as inherently precarious and vulnerable but also resilient and adaptable. Both the analysis of the EU's border regime in South-East Europe and the Eastern Partnership's Thematic Frameworks indicate how the EU's crisis management captures the indeterminate outside, bringing it into the EU's institutional fabric. Concurrently, complex and fluid apparatuses that exist outside the EU/non-EU binarism are rendered normal and legitimate through the production of a self-reflective and self-reliant resilient (South-)Eastern European subject. The transformative potential of the East's indeterminacy is consequently substituted for adaptability and endurance.

This brings us to the third proposition about the transformative potential of endurance. Our research shows that those subjected to indeterminate (chronic) crises have developed creative strategies to concurrently appropriate and transcend the established structures of crisis-governance to make sense of the European crisis on their own terms. This includes, for instance, dialectics between European border and migratory assemblages in the production of the Western Balkan Route as a space of control, action,

mobility, waiting and surveillance. In the case of the Eastern Partnership, this becomes visible when observing Ukraine's need to position itself as a source of potential insecurity to merit the EU's continued attention (political, transformative and financial), while trying to overcome this aura of insecurity and instability to position itself as a 'Western' contender for closer association with the EU proper.

## Notes

1. De Genova (2013) defines a border spectacle as a performance of exclusion and inclusion through the enforcement of a border by a constellation of actors, practices and images that simultaneously make 'migrants' visible as a category and render them illegal. Rescue spectacles refer to similar performances of the concurrent visibilization and criminalization of human mobility through police, military and humanitarian operations at sea.
2. May and Thrift (2001) have adopted the term 'timespace' to conceptualize how multiple and heterogeneous experiences and practices of social time are spatially bounded and vice versa.
3. The digital tools outlined (platforms, phones, apps, etc.), while critical for the mobility and survival of migrants, are also a growing tool in border and migration monitoring and in the rationalization and standardization of mobility patterns through the production of data analytics for risk analysis under the EURODAC database and the eu-LISA agency (Milivojevic, 2019).
4. Whereas the European Neighbourhood Policy as proposed by the European Commission and adopted by the European Council addresses the European Union's relations with 16 partner countries in both its Eastern and Southern (Mediterranean) neighbourhoods, this contribution is concerned only with the former.
5. Whereas the war between Georgia and Russia in August 2018 was already regarded as a crisis in the region, it was not subsequently framed as a 'European crisis'. Moreover, the EU's reaction to this brief, five-day event was to introduce 'more of the same', i.e. to step up its focus on conditionality and on institutional cooperation. Both found anchoring in the Eastern Partnership, which was launched in 2009 and can be seen as a direct consequence of the necessity perceived by the EU of enhancing its engagement with the Eastern European neighbourhood (see, for instance Council of the European Union, 2009; Neuman, 2015).

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